

CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD

1 Timothy 1:1-20

Key Verse: 1:15

"Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance:

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst."

1 and 2 Timothy are Paul's epistles to his partner in Christ, Timothy, in an attempt to instruct him how to be a great leader. In the New Testament, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus are known as pastoral epistles. These epistles instruct pastors how to teach and discipline God's sheep under their care. In today's passage Paul instructs Timothy to be careful of false teachers. But in reality, this passage is St. Paul's personal testimony: how he received God's grace and mission. Paul wrote his personal testimony so that Timothy might keep his basic attitude toward God Almighty and have God's grace upon him always.

I. Grace, mercy and peace from God be with you (1-11)

First, a servant of God must have grace, mercy and peace from God (1-2).

Look at verse 1. "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope." Usually Paul introduces himself, "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ." These days people say, "I am Bob or Jennifer." That's all. But in 1 Timothy 1:1, Paul introduces himself, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope." From his introduction, Paul was convinced that his calling from God was by the grace of Jesus Christ. Also, it was by the command of God our Savior. Here, "by the command of God," alludes to the fact that God is the Sovereign Ruler of history. And Paul had in his mind that he was appointed as the commander-in-chief in conquering the world with the gospel of Jesus. When Paul preached the gospel the world situation was the worst in history. The world was lawless and extremely unjust. The world was full of despaired men. To them, to have hope was impossible. Because of despair people were unable to think properly. But Paul had hope in Jesus Christ, as he said in the last part of verse 1. Let's read verse 1 one more time. "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope." There is no hope. But there is hope in Jesus Christ.

Look at verse 2. "To Timothy my true son in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord." Timothy's mother was a Jewess called Eunice and his grandmother was Lois (2Ti 1:5). 2 Timothy 1:7 implies that he was timid. He knew how to be loved, but he did not know how to love others. Moreover, he lacked self-control. Despite all of his weaknesses, he served Paul so persistently until he was known as a faithful man. Timothy joined Paul's second missionary journey (Ac 16:3). Timothy accompanied Paul to Troas, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea, where he remained until Paul sent for him to come to Athens (Ac 17:14-15). Timothy was, in character, one of the weaklings; he was not at all leadership material. But Timothy became faithful in the course of following Paul.

Paul and Timothy's main work place was Ephesus, where they spent three years raising disciples of Jesus during the third missionary journey. Then Paul visited Jerusalem to see the Christian brothers. There, he was imprisoned and he went to Rome in chains to be tried by the Roman Emperor. From a Roman prison he wrote the epistle to the Ephesians in about 62 A.D. It is certain that Paul was imprisoned in Rome, but he had a chance to revisit Ephesus some six or seven years later. During that time Paul passed on to Macedonia; he left Timothy at Ephesus, to oversee the work of God at Ephesus, expecting himself soon to return. Being detained in Macedonia

longer than he had planned, Paul wrote this letter of instruction to Timothy. From the narrative in Acts 19, it appears that Paul had made a vast multitude of Christian converts in Ephesus. In the intervening years, the number of converts had continued to grow. Within the following 50 years, Christians in Asia Minor had become so numerous that the heathen temples were almost forsaken. Within the Apostolic generation Ephesus became the center of Christendom. But there were many problems. There were no church buildings. Houses of Christian worship did not begin to be built until 200 years after the days of Paul, and the church was not known to the public until the time of Constantine put an end to the persecution of Christians. In Paul's day, churches met mostly in the homes of Christians. Scores of thousands of Christians in and around Ephesus met, not in one or a few great central congregations, but in hundreds of small groups in various homes, each congregation under its own pastoral leadership. There must have been hundreds of pastors. In Acts 20:17 they are called elders. In this epistle they are called bishops.

Timothy's work was primarily to train these pastors and congregational leaders in the place of St. Paul. And Paul thought that the foundation of gospel faith should be firmly established in Ephesus. So the false teachers should not bother new Christian converts. This is the reason Paul writes this letter to Timothy.

Look at verse 2. "To Timothy my true son in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord." In the first part of verse 2, in addressing Timothy, Paul said, "my true son in the faith." "In the

faith" means Jesus' death as a ransom sacrifice and his glorious resurrection and the kingdom of God to those who believe in him. Here we learn our Christian relationships should be based on Jesus' death as a ransom sacrifice and his glorious resurrection. Verse 2b says, "Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord." A servant of God is like a father with many sons. A father who has many sons has many problems because of his children. So he can not maintain grace, mercy and peace from God. But the servant of God, even though he has sons and daughters with many problems, must maintain God's grace, mercy and peace in his heart. When Paul said to Timothy, "Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord," it was not a formal greeting, but rather it was an instruction for Timothy to have such an inner peace from God.

Second, warning against false teachers of the law (3-11). Look at verse 3. "As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer." When Paul went into Macedonia, he told Timothy to stay in Ephesus so that he might somehow deal with false teachers. Where there was a work of God, there was also a work of Satan. Pure gospel Christians worked hard and won many new converts. Then, immediately, false teachers chased after them and made them pointless. The false teachers of the law did so in order to hinder the gospel of Jesus Christ. "False teachers" mainly talked about apocryphal Jewish legends

connected with Old Testament genealogies. Some Judaizers may have taught how to trim their moustaches and how to brush their beards and how to wear yarmulkes. They implied that anybody can enter the kingdom of God. As Paul had anticipated when he left Ephesus, now savage wolves would ravage the Ephesian flock of Christians (Ac 20:29-30). At that time, Judaism was known to the world. So their contact with people was very easy. On the other hand, Christians were unfamiliar to people of the world. According to the secular people's point of view, Christians were regarded as the followers of Jesus the Nazarene, who lived a holy and pure life. At that time, those who lived a holy life or a pure life were known as strange people who have no fun. Christians did not enjoy sinful pleasure. So people thought that Christians were strange people. The gospel ministry was not easy. When Christians worked hard and won several converts, then the false teachers took them away, as some contemporary anti-Christian organizations do nowadays. In view of history, Christianity is always regarded as something strange because Christians tried hard to live by the holiness of God.

Paul knew the false teachers made use of the law. Paul recognized that the law itself is good. But the law cannot save men from their sins. Only the

gospel of Jesus Christ can save men from their sins. Paul explained why the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is superior to the law. Look at verse 8. "We know that the law is good if one uses it properly." How nice it is if all the people of the world keep the law of God day and night. But sinful human beings break the law of God 100%, some of them 120%. So Paul said, the "law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers--and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine." For example, the summary of the whole Bible is to love God and to love your neighbor. When we love God and our neighbor we can live with a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith. How wonderful it would be to see all American young students having the key point of the Bible--love God, love your neighbor--and by doing so, keep a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith. This gospel ministry is not only for eternal salvation, it is for the extension of the kingdom of God. The gospel work was not easy (6). Many wandered away and followed false teachers because their teaching appealed to their easygoing mentality. For example, if they brushed their bushy beard one time and dropped by the synagogue for five minutes, they thought they had salvation. These days false teachers say that the world mission command was given only to the Eleven disciples. And that God is love, so everybody will go to the kingdom of God. They say that no one needs any discipline because God gave each person a unique character and free will. They deny divine discipline and human edification. It is a new theology based on hedonism and pragmatism.

II. Wonderful grace of Jesus (12-20)

First, God's grace and mission upon Saul (12-17). This part is not easy to understand for anyone who has not experienced the deep grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was nailed in his hands and feet on the cross. This part may

be easy for Peter to understand. Peter expressed this grace poetically by paraphrasing Isaiah (Isa 53:3-6): "O my Master, I betrayed you three times. Because of my sins you were nailed on the cross and whipped until you were badly wounded. But by your wounds I am healed." Paul also encouraged Timothy to remember God's grace in his heart always. For example, Jesus Christ considered Paul faithful when he was terribly unfaithful. Even if Paul was a dangerous man, the Risen Christ appointed him as the apostle for the Gentiles (Ro 1:5). When he was not trustworthy Jesus trusted him and gave him the most precious mission. Paul displayed his table of contents of sin in verse 13. "Though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief." He was a blasphemer and a persecutor of early Christians, who were desperately helpless. In order to gratify his selfish ambition he blasphemed God by persecuting the Risen Christ. He was the worst sinner. He should not remain on the earth. But Jesus visited him on the road to Damascus. When the Risen Christ appeared, suddenly light from heaven flashed around him, and the whole world became dark. Paul fell down to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Ac 9:4). Paul was the unique

one who persecuted the Risen Christ. Paul said, "The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly..." (14a) Not only did the Risen Christ pour out his grace upon him abundantly, but also he poured out abundantly the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The Risen Christ granted him the faith and love that the Risen Christ had. What a wonderful grace! Paul remembered God's grace even when he became a top leader of the Christian church. When Paul remembered his past sins, he felt that he was a crippled man. So he called himself, the "one abnormally born" (1Co 15:8b). Paul kept on saying in 1 Corinthians 15:9-10, "I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect." It is sure that when he told this testimony he cried a lot before young Christians even though he was an old man. There is a deep meaning in Paul's telling about God's grace. It is because servants of God must remember the grace of God in any circumstance. Paul is telling this to Timothy so that Timothy may not despair in any situation but remember God's grace and be strong.

Paul remembered that he was a forgiven sinner. Look at verse 15. "Here

is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst." Usually, many servants of God try to appear pious and holy. Many servants of God think that they are not sinners but that their church members are all rebellious and stingy sinners. Some Christians think that they are a little better sinners than their friends because their friends use drugs but they do not. Usually fallen men are very self-righteous. But Paul said, "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance...." Paul strongly urges that he was a sinner, but Jesus showered his grace upon him. At that time, St. Paul's spiritual level was in the heavenly realm. When he prayed, he did not know if he was on the second-dimensional level or on the third-dimensional level, the kingdom of God. In other words, through his prayer he entered into the kingdom of God and talked with God (2Co 12:2). But he never forgot God's grace and that he was the most terrible sinner. Paul's mission field was worldwide. His knowledge of God is matchless forever. But Paul remembered what kind of sinner he was. So he could remember the wonderful grace of Jesus every day, and his spiritual strength was renewed.

Paul remembered God's world salvation plan, that God wants to save all the lost ones and bring them back to his kingdom. For this, Paul did not spare his life--because of God's grace. Paul wanted Timothy to remember God's grace and overcome the world and conquer the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Second, Timothy, be a good fighter (18-20). St. Paul was like a four-star general in the work of salvation in the early Christian days. The enemy of God,

Satan, was bigger than the Rocky Mountains. The early Christians were like a bunch of penguins. But Paul did not say to Timothy, "Well, be careful. I know you have a weak physical body." Instead, Paul said, "fight the good fight" (18). It meant, "You gotta be a general and commander-in-chief even though you are younger. You gotta be a top leader even if you are the youngest among the elders. You gotta be a witness of our Lord Jesus Christ's death and resurrection and assurance of the kingdom of God to those who believe in him." From time to time we think those who are leadership material or general-like Christian leaders are born to be so. But according to Paul's faith, it is not so. Timothy was a kind of weakling, spoiled by his widowed grandmother and by his own mother. He did not receive any divine discipline from his father. In short, he was not great leadership material. But Paul recognized him as a commander-in-chief because of his faithfulness. People think smart people can do something. But according to Bible teaching, faithful people can be used by God. Here we learn that we should not see weaklings as weaklings, but with faith we must see them all as commanders-in-chief.

We want to do God's work wholeheartedly. But sometimes we do not know what to do. First, we must remember God's grace. Second, we must remember God's grace. Third, we must remember God's grace. Then God will abundantly bless our ministry.